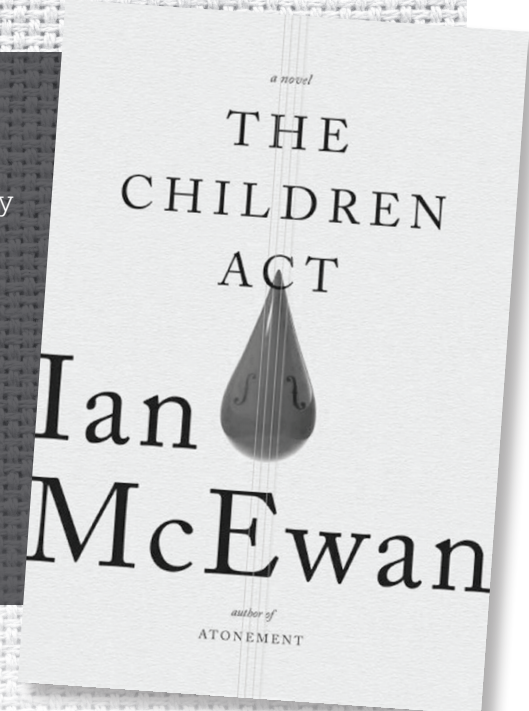

12. How does *The Children Act* enhance your experience of Ian McEwan's previous novels? What is unique about the way his characters approach moral dilemmas?

13. Explore a few of the recordings of Benjamin Britten's setting for "Down by the Salley Gardens" that are available online. How do the melody and the verses affect you? In your experience, what does it mean to take love and life "easy"?

Discussion Questions

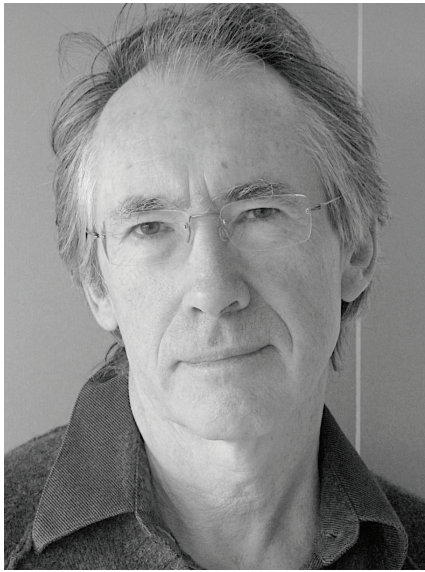
"Smart and elegant. . . . Reminds us just how messy life can be and how the justice system, despite the best of intentions and the best of minds, doesn't always deliver justice."
- *USA Today*

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Ian McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 in Aldershot, England. He studied at the University of Sussex, where he received a BA degree in English Literature in 1970. He received his MA degree in English Literature at the University of East Anglia.

McEwan's works have earned him worldwide critical acclaim. He won the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 for his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites*; the Whitbread Novel Award (1987) and the Prix Fémina Etranger (1993) for *The Child in Time*; and Germany's Shakespeare Prize in 1999. He has been shortlisted for the Man Booker

Prize for Fiction numerous times, winning the award for Amsterdam in 1998. His novel *Atonement* received the WH Smith Literary Award (2002), National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (2003), Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction (2003), and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel (2004). He was awarded a CBE in 2000. In 2006, he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *Saturday* and his novel *On Chesil Beach* was named Galaxy Book of the Year at the 2008 British Book Awards where McEwan was also named Reader's Digest Author of the Year. McEwan lives in London.

Book Summary

Fiona Maye is a leading High Court judge who presides over cases in the family court. She is renowned for her fierce intelligence, exactitude, and sensitivity.

But her professional success belies private sorrow and domestic strife. There is the lingering regret of her childlessness, and now her marriage of thirty years is in crisis.

At the same time, she is called on to try an urgent case: Adam, a beautiful seventeen-year-old boy, is refusing for religious reasons the medical treatment that could save his life, and his devout parents echo his wishes.

Time is running out. Should the secular court overrule sincerely expressed faith? In the course of reaching a decision, Fiona visits Adam in the hospital—and encounter that stirs long-buried feelings in her and powerful new emotions in the boy. Her judgment has momentous consequences for them both.

Discussion Questions

1. How did *The Children Act* affect your perception of family courts? What makes it so challenging for parents and the courts alike to follow the deceptively simple mandate that “the child’s welfare shall be the . . . paramount consideration”?
2. How would you react if your spouse made a proposal like Jack’s? Is Jack’s interest in Melanie purely sexual? When he asserts that couples in long marriages lose passion, is he right?
3. How would you have ruled in the first case described in *The Children Act*, regarding the education of Rachel and Nora Bernstein? Does Fiona approach religious freedom the same way in her ruling for Adam’s case?
4. How did your impression of Adam and his parents shift throughout the novel? How does his childhood exposure to religion compare to your own?
5. At the heart of Adam’s testimony is a definition of scripture, secured by faith in his religious leaders to interpret scripture perfectly. How should the government and the court system consider religious texts?
6. Both Jack and Adam are drawn to romantic ideals, albeit at opposite stages of life. Are their dreams reckless or simply passionate?
7. As Fiona reflects on her life, which choices bring her solace? How does she reconcile her childlessness with her notions of the ideal woman? How does her personal history affect her decisions in court?
8. Discuss Fiona’s sojourn to Newcastle. What is she pursuing on that journey? What is Adam pursuing when he follows her there?
9. What does “The Ballad of Adam Henry” (page 187) reveal about the nature of youth, and the nature of mortality?
10. What is Fiona able to experience through music that she can’t access any other way? For Mark (possibly with a new lover to impress), and for the Gray’s Inn community, what is the significance of the Great Hall concerts?
11. In the novel’s closing scene, what transformations do Jack and Fiona undergo?